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The Quarterly Journal of the Rhodesian Economic Society

Editorial Board:

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DEVELOPMENT IN RHODESIAN TRIBAL AREAS

H. DUNLOP*

"We have raised the Irish peasant from nothing to a state of abject poverty" (Statement attributed to an official of the Irish Farmers' Association.)

As the first fruits¹ of the much publicised and handsomely-financed Tribal Areas of Rhodesia Research Foundation,² Dr. A. J. B. Hughes' "Development in Rhodesian Tribal Areas: An Overview," cannot regrettably be regarded as a significant contribution towards a solution of what is undoubtedly the most critical economic problem facing the Rhodesian Government, namely, the appalling economic and ecological conditions of the African rural areas. However, it must be stated in fairness to the author that the fault is not in Dr. Hughes' undoubted abilities as an anthropologist, but in the research objectives of the Foundation and the method by which they have been implemented. There is a story, which once enjoyed wide circulation amongst international development agencies, of an FAO expert who wrote his report of the agricultural problems of a certain country while over-flying the territory; the report is doubtless apocryphal, but the moral is decidedly relevant to the study under review.

Need for Overview

It may indeed be questioned whether, in view of the voluminous published reports on all aspects of African agriculture, including overviews such as Makings [1], the Phillips Report [2] and Yudelman [3], such a contribution was needed.³ Furthermore, the omission from Dr. Hughes' study of crucial elements of an overview such as a critical assessment of Government's development strategy for the economy as a whole, including sectoral policies, financial commitments and land policy, is Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. In the reviewer's opinion, a series of monographs by individual specialists on various aspects of the problem, incorporating previous findings and providing more recent information, would have been a more worthwhile exercise.

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¹It is known that certain unpublished research has been financed by the Foundation but this publication is clearly the most significant contribution to date.

²The Tribal Areas of Rhodesia Research Foundation was founded in December, 1969, by the Associated Chambers of Commerce of Rhodesia. Income received by the Foundation, mainly from ACCOR members, for the period ending October 31, 1973 totalled \$118 293 and expenditure to the same date was \$48 766.

³Reference is also made in Dr. Hughes' study to a special survey, by a commercial organisation, commissioned by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

A second preliminary observation relates to the author's status as a civil servant on secondment from the Ministry of Agriculture. Such an arrangement must have placed the author in rather a delicate position, especially in view of the presence of an observer from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (which is responsible for tribal agriculture) on the Research Advisory Committee. The possible compensating advantage of ready access to official data does not appear to have been exploited to any significant extent.⁴ The Report abounds in expressions such as 'widespread' and 'substantial' in relation to certain matters about which Government might be expected to have had more specific information; the most ludicrous example of this genre is the statement that "... the corporation [the Agricultural Finance Corporation] does not *appear* to offer any credit facilities to agriculturalists in the TTL's [Tribal Trust Lands]". It is in fact fairly common knowledge that, with the exception of a few purchase land accounts, the Corporation operates exclusively in the European sector.

The decision to set up a special research unit is also rather puzzling in view of the existence of two appropriate research institutions at the University of Rhodesia. Furthermore, although the academic staff of the University includes a wide range of relevant specialists in the Faculty of Social Studies, the Department of Agriculture, the Faculty of Education, and other units, such as the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, the list of acknowledgments does not suggest that much use was made of these facilities. Moreover, there are numerous international and overseas academic development institutions that could have been utilized to ensure objectivity and the benefit of experience of agricultural development in other countries.

Concept of Development

The author concludes a fairly lengthy survey of various concepts of development with the statement that "... it would be quite wrong to assume that there is, in fact, any measure of agreement among authorities regarding exactly how development should be defined, and what development indicators should be used to measure the progress of the development process". It is true that there are still economists who refer glibly to growth rates based on controversial concepts of valuation, and statistical data of extremely questionable validity; and there are also sociologists [4] who revel in semantic balderdash such as modernization being "... the maximisation of the potential of the society within the limits set by the goals and the fundamental structure

⁴The omission is particularly regrettable in view of the fact that the Ministry of Internal Affairs no longer publishes the statistical data on African agriculture previously available in the Annual Reports of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Department of Native Affairs; it may also be noted that the 1973 Annual Report of the Secretary for Internal Affairs devotes only seven pages to all the various aspects of African tribal agriculture, a sector representing over 60 per cent of the total African Population.

(or forms) of the society", and development being "... the maximisation of the potential of the society, regardless of any limits currently set by the goals or the fixed structure of the society". But this kind of sophistry cannot be used to justify the author's pessimistic conclusion, especially in view of his acknowledgment of the work of Dudley Seers, [5] who, in the opinion of the reviewer, succeeded to a large extent in achieving his stated objective of clarifying the concept of development.⁵ It is perhaps a quibbling point, but the reviewer would prefer to say that a development objective *is* a value judgment rather than with Dr. Hughes, that it is "based on" or "based ultimately on" a value judgment. A statement such as "people should have an adequate income" *is* a value judgment and may be more acceptable to a government or a community if it is *not* buttressed by an appeal to moral or religious authority; it is perhaps noteworthy that Seers omits reference to Gandhi in later discussions of the concept. [5]

The reviewer suggests that the following economic objectives would be readily acceptable in most countries of the third world:

1. People should be provided with an opportunity to earn an income sufficient to meet their basic requirements in regard to food, clothing, housing, household necessities, medical and educational facilities.
2. Medical, educational and social facilities should be made readily available to meet the requirements of each community.
3. Effective policies should be implemented to reduce gross inequality of incomes either through control of the allocation of resources or by redistribution of incomes.
4. Freedom of economic choice (this would clearly be inconsistent with land apportionment and the system of land tenure within the tribal areas).

Development Objectives in Rhodesia

The sector dealing with the concept of development in the context of African agriculture is totally inadequate. This is a particularly serious omission since an historical account of government policies in this sector is essential to an understanding of the present problems of African agriculture and to the formation of appropriate remedial measures.

Apart from a brief period in the early 60's land policy has been directed towards the achievement of a final apportionment of land on a racial basis and this policy is basic to an understanding of the character of policy measures

⁵"The starting point in discussing the challenges we now face is to brush aside the web of fantasy we have woven around "development" and decide more precisely what we mean by it".

in other spheres. It explains in large measure the overwhelming concern with conservation which persisted until the early 60's and which has been renewed in recent years, the underlying object being to ensure adequate food supplies for a rapidly increasing population within the area allotted to the African people. It explains the costly policy of opening up remote tribal areas and the extension of irrigation facilities in the African areas, notwithstanding the gross under-utilization of land in the European sector.

Other policy objectives were, however, superimposed on the conservation theme, and certain measures, such as the Native Land Husbandry Act, though also concerned basically with the natural resources problem, resulted in a considerable investment in the infrastructure of the tribal areas. Organised marketing facilities for African farmers were first introduced in the early 40's and subsequently improved through the introduction of the co-operative movement in 1956 and the completion in 1961 of the three channel system for crops (Grain Marketing Board agents, co-operatives and the right to deliver direct to GMB depots) in the tribal areas; the selling arrangements for cattle were also greatly improved during the postwar period through the establishment of residual buying facilities by the Cold Storage Commission, at guaranteed prices, the introduction of auction sales in the 50's and more recently, the extension of permission for direct deliveries to CSC abattoirs.

However, the objective of creating a commercial agriculture in both Purchase Land and tribal areas became effective only in the 60's with the introduction of profitable cash crops, agricultural credit and greater emphasis on extension. At about the same time, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which was then responsible mainly for non-agricultural affairs in the African areas, introduced its policy of Community Development and the extension of Local Government in the African rural areas. In the absence of adequate information it is difficult to assess the extent to which these policy objectives are currently effective. It is clear that the much despised *agricolas*^a, operating in a favourable economic environment, have achieved remarkable production achievements in areas of reasonable agricultural potential and with the more progressive farmers; but the majority of tribal Africans continue to exist at subsistence level. More could undoubtedly have been achieved in terms of greater production if the largely abortive credit scheme had been related more closely to the new cash crops, and adequate provision had been made for repayment of loans; the current requirement for collateral security in the form of branded cattle would be equivalent to forcing European farmers in a similar situation to carry a brand on their Mercedes (it may also be noted that less than one-half of African farmers are stockholders and many of these have very small herds). The policy of Community Development would

^aA perjorative term coined by Elspeth Huxley and used with approval by Dr. Hughes.

appear to have succeeded to a very limited extent in organising community projects and in providing improved motivation for individual farmers in their production policies. So far as local government is concerned, the reviewer would suggest that African Councils are more likely to succeed as a felt need in the wake of economic improvement rather than as an "induced" development related to the provision of social services.

The Present Position of African Agriculture

This section of the report is a source of complete bewilderment to the reviewer. On page 63, Dr. Hughes refers to widespread adoption of sophisticated agricultural practices (use of kraal manure, fertilizers and the establishment of rotation grazing schemes), relatively large scale production of cash crops and stall-fed cattle; though at the same time, he admits that "accurate statistics regarding the agricultural situation in tribal areas are lacking". On the following page the author draws attention to a report of a Government survey which "revealed the very low extent to which a number of simple practices had been adopted" and on page 290, he makes the following statement, based on a confidential (!) report to the Ministry of Internal Affairs:

"One report estimates that in one TTL between two-thirds and three quarters of the families did not produce enough food to satisfy their own needs; that approximately one-third had no cattle; and that a high proportion did not possess adequate agricultural implements. There are other reports from many different areas of similar situations, where a minority of cultivators have the means to farm properly, but the majority do not.

In addition, the fertility status of much of the arable land has fallen to dangerously low levels. This makes it necessary for families to cultivate large areas in order to reap relatively small crops. To restore the fertility of these soils would be technically possible, but it would be costly, and involve a great deal of labour before any results were seen. In many areas there are insufficient cattle to provide enough manure to increase fertility and to use chemical fertilizer as a substitute on the scale required, would be a very costly procedure."

The most recent information on the state of technology in the African area [6] for the year 1969 indicates that some 5 per cent of all cultivators used fertilizer, less than half owned cattle, and 8 per cent owned scotch carts. The marked subsequent expansion in cotton production would suggest increased use of fertilizer though it is known that the crop is cultivated in many areas without the benefit of artificial nutrients.

The data on African production and sales require more careful interpretation than Dr. Hughes accords to them. In the first place, estimated consumption in African areas is a nominal figure based on the application of

estimated per capita consumption rates for the main foodstuffs, applied to an estimate of the rural population and valued at current producer prices. The value of sales through official marketing agencies should be adjusted to take account of levies, marketing costs and the value of purchased inputs; from the viewpoint of assessing productivity trends, the data should be deflated by an index of producer prices, while if cash incomes are the focus of interest, deflated values should be obtained by the application of an appropriate cost of living index. Elsewhere, Dr. Hughes states that the decline in African maize sales is not a matter for concern. It is, however, believed that imports of maize and maize meal into the African rural areas have increased markedly in recent years; while this may be due in part to the practice adopted by some cotton specialist and producers of stall-fed cattle of purchasing their requirements of maize for food or feed, the reviewer would suggest, especially in view of the confidential report quoted above, that the capacity of the African areas to meet its own food requirements has been seriously diminished by the pressure of population on land resources. This is a matter for serious concern, especially in view of the irreversible nature of much of the natural resource deterioration and the cost, in other cases, of the remedial action required to restore soil fertility. It is true that considerable progress had been made in establishing mechanical conservation works in the tribal areas, but the more vital problem of biological protection has scarcely been touched upon.

Problems of African Agriculture

The report does not add much to our existing knowledge of specific problems of African agriculture. Dr. Hughes had already published his main findings on land tenure, but there is considerable interest and value in his discussion of the relationships between various organisations and groups, especially in regard to the relatively new Tribal Development Groups (as Dr. Hughes admits, however, the "tribal" factor is somewhat elusive).

As an anthropologist, the author expresses due reverence for tribal institutions. As an economist, the reviewer would venture the following observations:

1. The record of tribal authorities in promoting the economic and social development of their areas is scarcely impressive. In the days when Chief Native Commissioners were rather more forthright in their views, references to the calibre of tribal authorities were far from flattering (evidence will be found in any of the early postwar reports of the Department of Native Affairs). However, to the extent that tribal institutions can be utilized to promote development, they should certainly be encouraged, though the reviewer considers that the possibilities are rather limited.

2. The subsistence mentality, which both the author and the Research Advisory Committee so strongly deplore, is a relic of the universal objective of tribal communities in giving first priority to security of food supplies. Similarly, the desire for large families has tribal roots, and the general experience of the third world is that birth control policies are successful only in communities that are characterised by a certain degree of economic development and modernity.
3. Witchcraft, the extended family, the observance of "Chisi" days, and beer parties as the basis of work groups, are positively detrimental to development efforts.
4. In view of the aspirations and desired life style of the younger generation of Africans, Government's policy of attempting to perpetuate what remains of tribal society is as much in the nature of an imposition of an "alien culture" as the introduction of Western-style institutions.

This section also includes some useful findings by Paraiwa on the economic problems of irrigation schemes and Purchase Areas; it is clear from the irrigation studies that water rates should be fixed in relation to the commercial potential of each individual scheme. Cheater's findings on the basis of field work in a Purchase Area only confirm — and the need for such confirmation may be questioned — the excellent diagnoses to be found in recent reports of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Natural Resources Board. Theisen's suggestion of a correlation between malnutrition and economic performance is scarcely a revelation and, when considered in relation to other factors influencing productivity, may have limited practical significance.

Land Policy

Dr. Hughes' assertion, on the basis of somewhat obscure observations about land use in African areas, that the present problems of the TTL's do not stem primarily from land shortage, represents a rather superficial analysis of the problem. It is indeed difficult to understand how any conclusion can be reached about the adequacy of the land resources of a community without reference to income targets, population growth rates and agro-ecological conditions. At the time of implementation of the Native Land Husbandry Act, Government envisaged that the African rural population could be stabilized at some 350 000 families; this figure was related to a rather modest target level of income (£71 p.a. per family, including production for own consumption, eight years after implementation of the Act, and assuming a substantial reduction in the rural population), and based on a decidedly questionable land-use plan for the lower rainfall areas (the agronomists refused to recommend cultivation of land in Region V). Allowing for the

subsequent increase in the size of the tribal areas (and the inferior quality of the additional land), the maximum number of families on this basis may be estimated at about 400 000. The most recently published information on the number of cultivators (1968) is 550 000 and the current figure is probably in the region of 650 000. On the basis of data on the estimated rural population dependent on agriculture [7], which is probably a more meaningful comparison, the increase between 1960 and 1973 was over 60 per cent and present indications suggest a further increase of 60 per cent over the next decade. Field studies carried out by the reviewer reveal the existence of a substantial landless group, a large proportion of sub-economic units and a marked extension of cultivation into the grazing areas.

In the more richly endowed European farming area the 1969 population census results show that population density was only 5.6 persons per sq. km., as compared with an average for the tribal areas of 18 persons per sq. km., and densities in the region of 30-50 persons per sq. km. in many TTLs. The Agro-Ecological Survey [8] of the European farming area estimated the potential arable area in Regions I-III at some 7m. acres: the most recent estimate of the area under dry land crops (including planted pastures, green manure crops and follow land) was just over 1m acres in 1965 and it is doubtful whether the current total is much in excess of 1.25m acres.

The following quotation from the report on the question of land tenure relates to the United States, but it clearly has considerable relevance to the national land policy in Rhodesia:

'The National Coalition for Land Reforms exists to promote changes in the present system of land holding, to make land more easily accessible to individuals who want to live and work on it. This is seen as the answer to social and environmental deterioration of both rural and urban America. Making the land accessible to small farmers, they argue, is 'the key to alleviating rural poverty, easing urban overcrowding, reducing welfare costs and unemployment, protecting the rural environment and building a stronger democracy'."

The urgent need for a reappraisal of land policy in Rhodesia is underlined by a consideration of the distribution of the tribal population by agro-ecological regions. On the basis of the 1969 census of population, the reviewer estimates that 28 per cent of the de facto population is resident in Region III and about 50 per cent in Regions IV and V.⁷ Having regard also to the extent of cultivation in the grazing areas and the ecological deterioration of the latter, it is clear that a solution to the conservation problem is impossible

⁷It has been stated by a previous Land Development Officer, Mr. K. Brown, that all the arable land in the African area falls into the lowest land capability class (IV) which should be cropped only two years out of five, with a three year lay break. (13).

within the constraints imposed by the Land Tenure Act. The reviewer can add nothing to the frequent prognostications of ecological disaster by the Natural Resources Board than to draw attention to the fact that even a sophisticated society such as the United States failed to take cognizance of similar warnings:

"High prices of agricultural products during the war and post-war period lead to the bringing under cultivation of large areas in the Great Plains of the Middle West, where the vegetal cover should never have been broken. Ensuing droughts and winds and rains on the unprotected surface produced desert conditions and pauperised the population. A spectacular dust storm arising in this area in May, 1934, obscured the sun over a wide area of the N.E. States, invaded the Capitol at Washington and travelled beyond the Atlantic seaboard . . ." [9].

Motivation

The Research Advisory Committee is obviously bemused by the concept of "motivation" or the so-called "sociological problem". In the first place it may be noted that, given adequate land resources, a profitable enterprise, and a carefully planned and executed extension programme, some African farmers at least are capable of responding to economic incentives.* Production of cotton was first introduced into the Gokwe area in 1962; in the most recent season, sales, mainly from the tribal areas, totalled 14.7 m.kg. (valued at about \$3,75m) and similar results have been achieved in other areas. The more recent upsurge in groundnut sales may also be attributed to an increase in profitability, but here the technical aspects of production are less satisfactory. Secondly, studies of development in other countries have revealed the vital importance of economic factors as an instrument of social change. It has frequently been shown that the failure of farmers to increase their efforts may be traced to specific factors, such as size of holding, soil fertility, inappropriate land-use plans, lack of financial resources, marketing facilities and so on.

The importance of the economic factor for both production and conservation is illustrated by the following quotation from Reid [14]:

"The farmer who had always existed at a subsistence level was suddenly faced with the possibility of achieving an increase in income, not a slight increase in his normal income, but a two —, three — or even tenfold increase. He saw for the first time in his life the possibility of obtaining, by his own efforts, what to him was great wealth.

*See reference [14].

"This gave the normally reticent and conservative farmer a new lease on life and he now put tremendous effort into his farming, working at week-ends and, in some cases even at night, ploughing by moonlight or by the light of a hurricane lamp.

"The small scale farmer became conscious of cost economics and his general standard of farming improved. He became bolder in his attitude towards credit and more confident in his ability to repay loans. The high standard of management required by cotton began to be applied to other crops and stumping, ploughing, accurate depth and spacing of planting, weeding and reaping improved and his attitude towards fertilizer changed favourably . . .

"On the other hand, where a resource, in this case soil, can provide not only a living but a very good one, the conservation of this resource is, if not automatic, comparatively easy to achieve. Good farming methods are conservation-farming and once a farmer is putting money into his land, the improved biological status of that land may ensure conservation. If this is inadequate the farmer will more readily accept the need for mechanical measures and construct the necessary devices with little, if any, coercion."

However, as in other countries, there would appear to be a large number of individuals who have a marked aversion towards agricultural work (or, perhaps, work of any kind), and a lack of interest in extension services. Even in Israel, where every conceivable effort was made to settle "folk" immigrants on the land, a very high proportion drifted into the towns. The reviewer would argue that the community, either in a broad or a narrow sense of the term, should (a) have powers to utilise the land resources of "reluctant" farmers and (b) accept moral responsibility for their dependents.

But the basic problem in the African rural areas today is not, as Dr. Hughes insists throughout his report, to increase production⁹, but to adopt whatever measures are possible to improve the welfare of people subject to severe constraints on their economic choice. A European may buy a farm anywhere within the European area, or if he has a preference for non-agricultural employment he will normally have a reasonably wide range of alternatives; an African, born in an inhospitable tribal area, with limited educational and material resources may have no alternative but to eke out a miserable existence within the area of his domicile. The welfare problem therefore embraces the whole community and appropriate development policies should make provisions for all classes of persons.

⁹It is true that additional production of agricultural goods contributes towards the development of the economy as a whole, but from a national standpoint, increased food production does not have the over-riding importance that it has in, say, India.

The possibilities of finding a solution in growth centres in the rural areas requires a great deal of critical examination. Clearly, the creation of peri-urban industrial centres such as Seki (the type of decentralization that other countries are trying to avoid or to get rid off) has no relevance. The agricultural base approach is also a complex issue (it is unnecessary to travel further than Karoi to recognise its limitations). And, as the Quinton Report [2] pointed out, African townships have not provided a solution, although there is an urgent need for research into spatial aspects of rural planning.

Guidelines for the Future

1. In his introduction to the report, Mr. D. H. Cummings refers to the "strenuous efforts" made by Government over a period of more than fifty years to stimulate the development of the tribal areas. It is presumed that this comment refers to the dedicated efforts of the very limited number of officials in the Department of Native Affairs and its successor organisations operating in the African rural areas; the Department of Native Affairs was certainly no mere instrument of the politicians and its report contain many trenchant criticisms of official policies. In terms of government expenditure, however, efforts in the period up to 1945 were negligible; indeed, an official report [10] shows that the African sector, in addition to supplying a major proportion of the labour requirements of the commercial sector (a considerable investment in human capital), provided revenue far in excess of government expenditure on administration, agriculture, education and infrastructure in the African rural areas. Expenditure increased steadily in the postwar period, but African agriculture continued to remain a poor relative of its European counterpart; current expenditure on African agricultural services in the tribal areas cannot be identified in the estimates of expenditure for the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but it may be noted that when responsibility for tribal agriculture was transferred in 1969 from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the vote for the Department of Conservation and Extension fell by £0.8m and that for the latter rose by £1.1m., a very small proportion of government expenditure.
2. Experience in all countries demonstrates conclusively that the first requirement is a firm commitment by government to development — not in grandiloquent declarations of intention but in terms of financial commitment. Indeed, there are many economists like Baran [11] who consider the political factor to be the real problem of underdevelopment. Referring to the concentration of power of wealth in the hands of the ruling elites in countries of the third world, he states:

"There would seem to be no exit from the impasse. The ruling coalition of interests does not abdicate of its own volition, nor does it change its character in response to incantation. Although its individual members occasionally leave the sinking ship physically or financially (or in both ways), the property owning classes as a whole are as a rule grimly determined to hold fast to their political and economic entrenchments . . .

If the threat of social upheaval assumes dangerous proportions, they tighten their grip on political life and move rapidly in the direction of unbridled reaction and military dictatorship. Making use of favourable international opportunities and of ideological and social affinities to ruling groups in other countries, they solicit foreign economic and sometimes military aid in their efforts to stave off the impending disaster."

But the ensuing revolution may lead only to the replacement of one elite by another. W. B. Yeats, who may be presumed to have been innocent of the problems of the third world, other than his native Ireland, stated the dilemma rather cogently as follows:

"Parnell came down the road, he said to a cheering
man:
'Ireland shall get her freedom and you still break
stone:'"

The challenge facing the European electorate is whether it can recognise that its continued existence depends on the economic development of the African Rural Areas.

3. Responsibility for all aspects of European and African agriculture should be vested either in a single ministry or in a development authority with executive powers.
4. The Land Tenure Act should be amended to allow the establishment of dryland settlement schemes for Africans in the main cropping areas, and eventually the free purchase of land by persons, irrespective of race, in any part of the country. Such a measure is essential in the light of economic and conservation problems in the African areas, under-utilization of land resources in the European area, and for the development of the economy as a whole. As the Quinton Report [12] stated " . . . to reserve any specific portion of the colony for the exclusive use of Africans, while the remainder of the colony is available to all races, is to condemn that area to economic stagnation". As experience with the Un-reserved Area showed, this need not involve social integration, though Israeli development indicates the need for regional centres providing not only services but facilities for desired integration.

5. There is an urgent need for problem-orientated, technical, economic and sociological research based on delineated development areas. The approach envisaged is essentially that of the IADP in India, but with primary emphasis on people rather than production. In the opinion of the reviewer the research findings produced by the African unit at Henderson Research Station, and the experience or organisations such as African Farming Development, have limited validity for the African area as a whole; there are also fundamental research problems relating to land use, minimum tillage techniques and so on in the African areas which have not been resolved. Technology, extension, marketing facilities, credit, farm plans and so on must be tailored to meet the requirements of each area.

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